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IDENTIFIERS

ABSTRACT

As part of a continuing program designed to provide Nevada's school population with information that will facilitate greater awareness and understanding of past and present Native Nevadan lifestyles and contributions, this generalized curriculum guide might constitute a social studies unit for upper elementary and/or junior high schools. Areas covered are: (1) The Political and Family Life (assumed to have been one and the same thing among prehistoric Desert Culture Indians); (2) Ceremonial and Religious Life (group and individual needs were met via ceremonies held for religious purposes and those held for "pure fun"); (3) Pleasure (gossiping, playing group games, feasting, and dancing); (4) Social Orientation (minimal communication between different prehistoric tribes but maximum communication and strict conformity within a given tribe); (5) Basketry (history and purpose of basket weaving, including an anecdotal biography of Dat-So-La-Lee, a famous Washoe woman who lived from 1828-1925). This biographical section constitutes the major portion of the guide, tracing Dat-So-La-Lee's career from her early devotion to religious ceremonial baskets to those later woven for economic survival at the request and specifications of the white man. (JC)

# INDIANS OF NEVADA

by

HELEN DUNN

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FOREWORD

The Nevada State Department of Education is pleased to be able to publish this series as part of a continuing program of information on Nevada Indians.

This program is designed to provide Nevada's school population with information in order that they may have a greater awareness and understanding of the lifestyle, past and present, as well as the contributions made by the Native-Nevadans.

No attempt has been made to edit or alter the author's original manuscripts.

  
Chas. H. Poehlman, Consultant  
(Indian Education)

ABOUT

HELEN DUNN

A native of Leadville, Colorado, she came to Goldfield, Nevada, when a baby. There she went through the school system, and graduated from Esmeralda County High School with high honors.

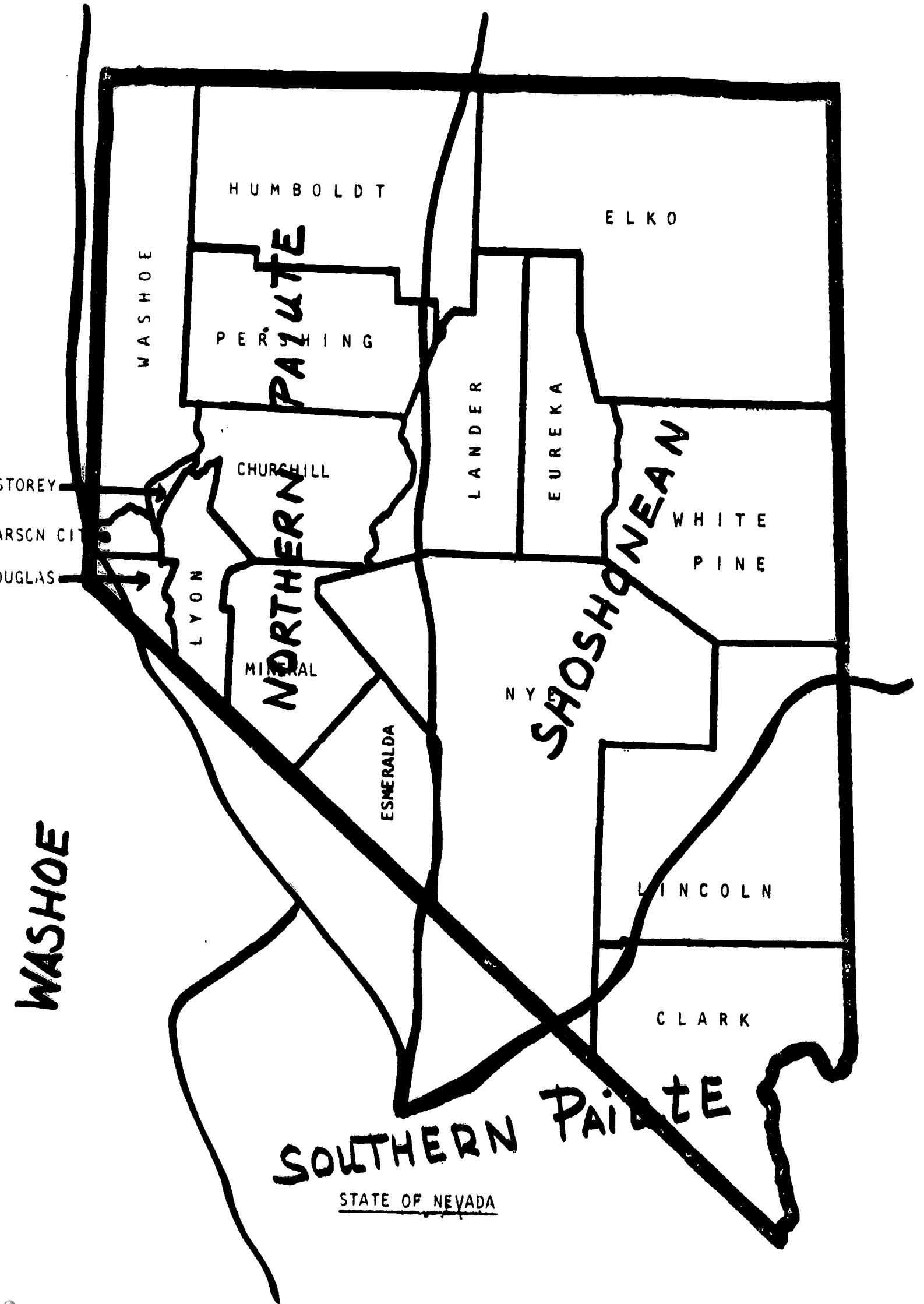
She is a graduate of the University of Nevada, specializing in history and received a B.A. An M.A. degree in Journalism was received from the University of Colorado.

She taught in Goldfield High School and in Reno's Billinghamurst Junior High School.

Helen Dunn has long been identified with the study of Nevada. She fostered such a study at Billinghamurst where a section of the school's library is known as the Helen M. Dunn Nevada History Library.

She has written several Nevada booklets which will be published by the Nevada State Department of Education.

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## THE POLITICAL AND FAMILY LIFE

Little, if anything, has been reconstructed from archeological excavations concerning the political and family culture of the prehistoric Indians. We do know that cultural patterns change, though slowly. Therefore, some things concerning this phase of prehistoric life is only by inference. One of these being that the political and family life was one and the same thing.

Some of the facts thought to describe this part of the Desert Culture Indians were the meaning of certain words. "Mothers" and "aunts" were the same in some languages, as were "father" and "uncle". The words "grandmothers" and "grandfathers" were also substitutes for "parent" and were the wise ones to whom all turned to learn.

It is thought that there were no experts, only those from whom advice was sought because of their experience.

Leaders were selected for special tasks by a type of democratic group choice. This leadership, however, was not sought because it carried grave responsibility. The decision to move was made by the leader in an automatic manner and many times because of dire necessity. Perhaps, one illustration of this would be the need of food. Perhaps the knowledge that food was ripening in certain areas, or that animals were on the move prompted the decision of the leader. The small band followed his command with unity of purpose.

## CEREMONIAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Reconstructed from the prehistoric and the present practices, it is known that ceremonials serve a part of the Indian culture. Identified with groups which were small in number, the ceremonies for "pure fun" and ceremonies of religious nature and meaning were held. In these the needs of the individuals, as well as the group were fulfilled and satisfied.

\* \* \* \* \*

PLEASURE

Study of the Desert Culture Indians reveal that they were pleasure-loving people. Once the basic needs were satisfied (and hard work was needed for this), they turned to leisure and enjoyment. This was very simply done, as they enjoyed such simple things as talking together, exchanging gossip, and playing group games. It is learned, too, that they feasted together, danced together, and yes--made love.

Naturally, the Indians did not engage in many of the pleasures of today's world. They had never enjoyed them; therefore, they were not missed.

## SOCIAL ORIENTATION

A study of the Desert Culture Indians makes the following facts known to us.

- (1) This primitive society belonged to several language families. The most important of these were the Northern Paiute, Hokan speakers, Shoshoni, and Ute-Chumehuevi.
- (2) These languages were broken into dialects, and only closely related dialects could understand each other.
- (3) The dialects that were common in traits made it possible for the band members to have some communication. This was, however, minimal and sporadic.
- (4) When necessity came, the older members of the bands were the arbiters.
- (5) Customs were contained in the ceremonial and religious life. Thus, one's actions of behavior were well defined.
- (6) The hardships of primitive living was a concern to all. It was vital that they conform for the best of all.
- (7) Reward was immediate to the band members who conformed and complied to the needs of the band.
- (8) Punishments, when needed, were swift to those not, as we might say, cooperating. Shame and ridicule were powerful "weapons" of censor. Also, ostracism and death by stoning were powerful means of punishment.
- (9) When what might call discipline got "too tough", children left and went to their grandparents. The tension was often softened, too, by laughter, pleasure, and feasting.

## BASKETRY

Perhaps, one of the most interesting of prehistoric cultures and into historic times, was that of basketry. Some of the finds, dating back as far as 8,500 years before Christ, reveal twisted bags, coiled trays and bowls, and even sandals. Fibers of plant life furnished the needed material. Many of these were found in excavated caves such as Gypsum, Danger, Lovelock and Humboldt. Many of these had been covered by thousands of years of dung deposits left by prehistoric animal life such as the giant sloth.

Stories of the Indian culture in historic times tell of the basket weaving art. The Washoe groups were especially noted for this. Their baskets, woven largely from willow twigs, were not made for ornamental purposes. They were tools for specific purposes. These included pitch-covered water jugs, large burden baskets to carry needed material, especially food. There were baskets so made as to scoop fish from the water, to use for cooking food, and to carry babies. The baskets were a necessity of the Desert Culture.

One of the most famous basket weavers of the Washoe Tribe was Dat-So-La-Lee. We would be amiss not to tell something about the life of this famous person.

### THE LIFE OF DAT-SO-LA-LEE\*

Dat-So-La-Lee was her Indian nickname. Her name by marriage was Louisa Kayser. Her Indian name was Dabuda. She was born in an Indian village in Douglas County, Nevada, which is now the site of the deserted town of Sheridan. Her childhood was spent among the scenes than unknown to white men, the glistening Sierra Nevada, their virgin pines and Lake Tahoe, "The Lake of the Skies" of which on his first trip Mark Twain wrote "As it lay there with the shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface, I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords".

It was evidently to these early scenes of nature's beauty and splendor to which the weaver's memory again and again returned through a long, eventful and changeful life Undoubtedly these scenes seventy-five years later inspired her to use as the designs for her best baskets such subjects as "Dawn", "Flowing Streams", "Sunrise among the Hills", "The Beacon Light", and "Myriads of Stars Shine Over the Graves of our Ancestors and Their Leaders".

The exact date of her birth is unknown. Her age was relatively determined through the incidents she related. Shortly before she died she led the way to a spot in Eagle Valley, to a knoll in the western part of Carson City, the state capitol of Nevada, and said that on this spot, she, when already a grown woman, probably eighteen years old, first saw white men. This was supposed from the descriptions to be scouts from an expedition under John C. Fremont in 1846. Eagle Valley, rich in hot springs and game, such as fish, deer, eagle and antelope, was a favorite Indian camping ground. To this spot came on horseback with pack animals, a group of soldiers to hold a conference with the Indians. Dat-So-La-Lee had a young boy, her nephew, with her. One of the mounted soldiers jokingly approached the boy; the horse reared and one of its fore legs struck the boy throwing him to the ground. Immediately a man with epaulettes on his shoulders asked the man to dismount and talk to her, evidently to apologize.

Dat-So-La-Lee was probably eighteen years old at that time and by adding the seventy-nine intervening years between then and her death in 1925, it has been judged that she was ninety-six years old when she died.

She lived through the early history of the state and saw the coming and passing of the greatest mines the world has ever known, with their long trains of wagons, the teams and teamsters. She also saw the building and decadence of several cities, the coming of the railroads and the building of better roads. Those were days of the amassing and quick decline of great wealth. She beheld the coming of the energetic and able business men and women who built schools, homes and churches, and the arrival of the outcasts of society, the criminals, the swindlers, the gamblers, the thieves and prostitutes. Unfortunately, it was apparently the abandoned classes who most freely mingled among the Indians while the white men were digging out of the Comstock Mines the estimated amount of \$700,000,000.

During those years Dat-So-La-Lee washed for the miners and scrubbed and cooked for the wives of the prosperous residents in the fast growing cities by day and gambled by night.

In 1871, she found employment in the family of the leading merchant, Harris Cohn, a then busy mining region of Monitor in Alpine County. There she became familiar with the methods of the Indian traders and also became much attached to the curly headed little Abe Cohn to whom she turned for help years later. To the little boy she was the Indian servant who worked to support her two children and her consumptive husband named Assu. Even as a child little Abe realized that she was at times fiery tempered and determined, and that it behooved him to please her in order to get her to do his bidding.

The years passed, her husband and children died and she later married a mixed blood, Charley Keyser, with whom she lived until her death in 1925 and who survived her two years. No children were born of this second marriage; she left no direct descendants. Charley Keyser was an artist in his own line. He made the repeating arrows which he sold to the whites.

Just how many Indians inhabited this region in prediscovery days is not known, but the number evidently changed rapidly at times for stories were told to the early white men of fierce battles between the Washoes and the Paiutes. It is told that in the early sixties the Paiutes made war on the Washoes and subdued them. In the treaty of subjection it was agreed that no Washoe could ride a horse, that no woman could make a basket of quality and that no Washoe should pass the imaginary line from now Empire, Nevada to Topaz, California. During the battle, Dat-So-La-Lee said, she and her chiefs destroyed all the fine baskets she had made. She, herself, claimed to be a medicine woman, and she made baskets only for ceremonial purposes; that is, those which were to be put into the graves of the chiefs and medicine men. Such baskets were too sacred to be permitted to fall into the hands of the enemy. Therefore, when subjection seemed inevitable, the baskets were burned.

Many war stories are still told by the descendants of these Indians who now live; the Washoes in and around Carson City, Minden and Gardnerville, Nevada, and Woodfords and Loyalton, California; the Paiutes who are found mostly in Virginia City, Winnemucca, Lovelock, Wellington, and from Reno to Tonopah and Las Vegas in Nevada and at Bridgeport, California and the northern part of Nevada and southern Oregon and the Mono Indians consisting of a few scattered families in Coleville, Bodie, Bridgeport and Mono Lake, California.

During the tribal restriction days, which were also the heydays of Nevada's prosperity, Dat-So-La-Lee made only culinary objects. Work for a strong Indian woman was plentiful and money could be quickly earned. Also, Dat-So-La-Lee and her husband, Charley Keyser, were both great gamblers; the games of chance flourished and liquor flowed freely in those days among the whites as well as among the Indians in Nevada and California. To the music of the weird tom tom by the Indian campfires Dat-So-La-Lee played intensely with both men and the women. Sometimes with the "white men's cards", but more frequently with Indian gambling sticks. The stakes were money, precious stones and bullion. Dat-So-La-Lee was known to spend two nights and two days in continuous gambling. In the Indian stick game all the money, stones, bars or ingots were thrown into the center pot and the player who got the final drop in either the short or the long sticks won all the pot.

The gambling sticks, rescued from the burning of her home after her death, according to the tribal custom, are three sets of four sticks each, one set is of wood, the other of polished bone and the third, her favorite set, is of Washoe weave, made by herself. This set, now a part of the Dat-So-La-Lee collection, shows the same fine quality of workmanship for which her baskets are famous. The size of the sticks range from 3/8 of an

inch to 1-3/8 inches long and 1/8 inch in thickness. The sticks are beautiful in design, intricate in weave and very carefully executed. They are made from the white salix, the red cersis and the black peteridium. Dat-So-La-Lee said that similar sticks were much used by her forefathers.

These sticks are unique in the collection, for they alone give the only hint of that side of Dat-So-La-Lee's life. In weaving into her baskets the traditions, legends, religion, and history of her people she remains true to her ideals of beauty and art. Not in a single instance does she carry into her art any of the unwholesome things of her life.

The days of Nevada's mighty wealth quickly passed. The lean years came. Work for the Indian woman became scarce. Also her years were slipping past and she had become less desirable as a servant so she turned to her old discarded art of Indian basketry.

The primitive Indian women always created their articles for useful purposes and they left the stamp of a process on them. Dat-So-La-Lee had made many culinary articles used in the hunt and to carry burdens before the coming of the cheap tin pails and the gunny sacks.

When money became very scarce, in 1895, Dat-So-La-Lee, then about sixty-six years old, made from woven willow four covered flasks and trudged on her small moccasined feet, the long road that led to the store of Abe Cohn, her old friend, who had become a merchant in Carson City and was conducting a men's furnishing store, but who realized that the art of Washoe Indian basketry weaving was rapidly vanishing and would in a very short time become extinct and be lost to the cultural inheritance of America. He had begun in a small way the hobby of making a collection of Indian baskets. He was impressed with the work of the flasks which Dat-So-La-Lee brought and after some hours of visiting, the large woman trudged home carrying in her mind the instructions to "go home, forget the long years of submissions agreement that no Washoe woman is to make a basket, and make a real ceremonial basket". That visit changed the trend of Dat-So-La-Lee's life. She began to gather materials for ceremonial baskets.

In pre-historic times and in many tribes today, only the woman may gather the materials used in making the ceremonial articles. Among the Washoes, at that time, only the women were present at the collecting. No men were permitted near and tribal prayers were chanted during the process of the gathering and preparing of the willows, ferns and red bud branches for the drying and seasoning of the basket materials.

Dat-So-La-Lee quickly made several ceremonial baskets which she readily sold to her friends who recognized the exquisite beauty of her creations which were pleasing in design, excellent in form and fine in stitch. Whenever Dat-So-La-Lee had sold a basket she would take a long vacation. For months she would not work. She needed constant encouragement and followup with coaxing and the offering of presents and a bonus. Sometimes it took her a year to finish a basket.

In the Indian camp her surroundings were sordid and her social mode of life kept her from doing desirable work. Finally in despair her sponsor built a house for her and her husband on his own residence grounds in Carson City. This house was equipped with modern conveniences and furnished for a work room and place to store her materials. Here they lived for nine months each year while the summer months were spent at Lake Tahoe. All of her baskets were bought as rapidly as they were completed and a generous bonus was given to both Dat-So-La-Lee and her husband whenever a basket was sold from the collection. Also, whenever her sponsor visited the Lake Tahoe Store, usually every two weeks, both Dat-So-La-Lee and Charley looked for a present from "the boss". They were fed and clothed and had their fuel furnished and their doctor bills paid for them.

Dat-So-La-Lee could devote all her time to weaving but she would make just one large basket a year and she needed much coaxing and encouragement. She spent the rest of her time in idleness or weaving miniature baskets.

The housework had to be done by her husband or by some friend who refused to endure the disorder any longer. Among the friends who frequented her home were Indian women who realized an opportunity to also make money through basketry and who made some excellent baskets. Among the most outstanding were "Tootsey Dick Sam, Scees and Lame Minnie". Of these Lame Minnie seemed to have the greatest appreciation for order and neatness and she frequently brought order out of disorder and messiness.

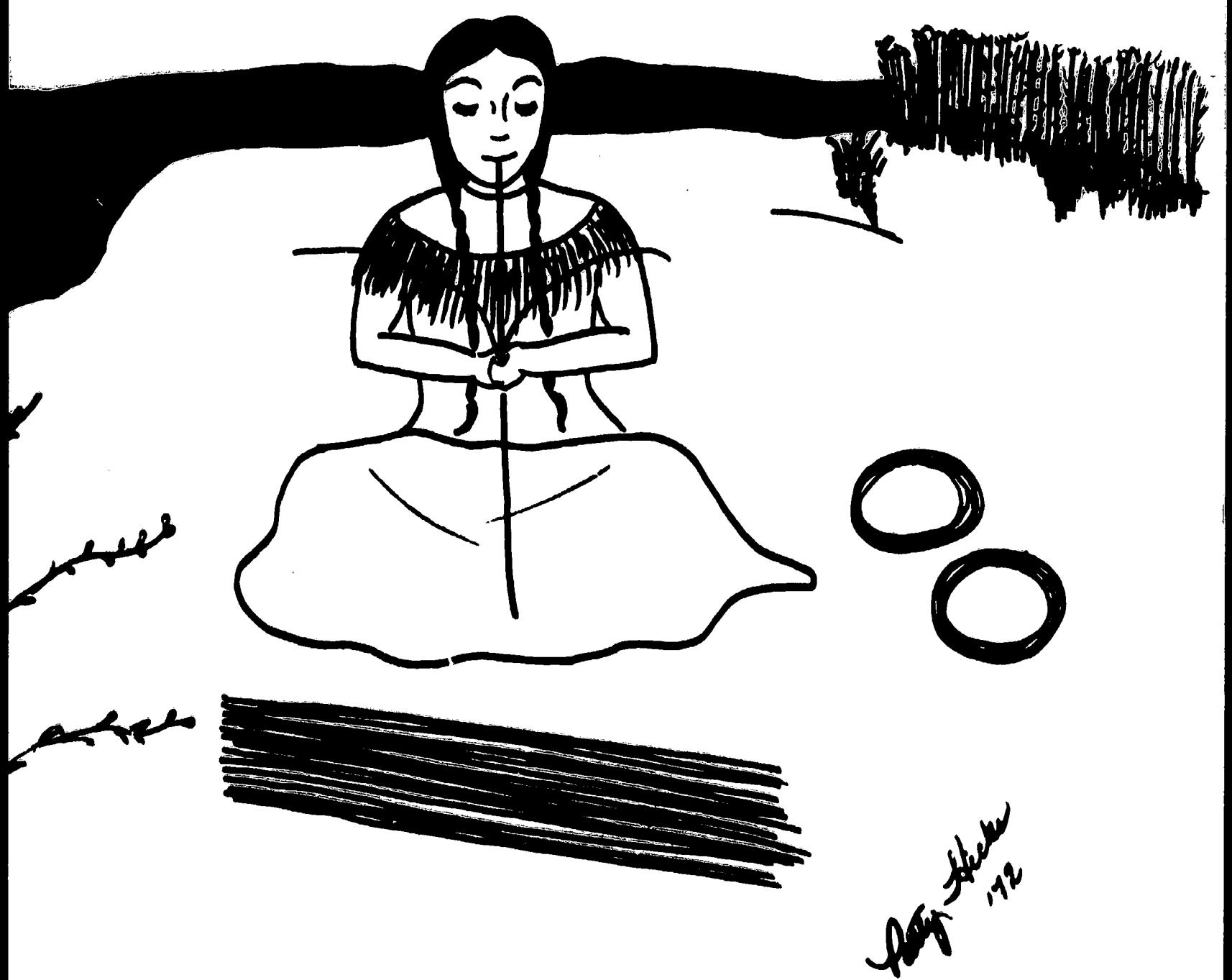
Dat-So-La-Lee often longed to make interior articles for the tourist trade at Lake Tahoe, but her sponsor discouraged this for he wished her to make only superior baskets. So Dat-So-La-Lee would spend her time in weaving but each day she would put at her feet a basket in which she had put coins. Whenever visitors came to her compoodie she would jingle the money and refuse to weave until some tips had been given. In this way she frequently collected ten dollars a day.

Much publicity was given to the work through the exhibition of the baskets and through the local press.

Mr. Cohn took Dat-So-La-Lee, Mrs. Cohn and a young Indian woman to the Arts and Crafts Exhibit at St. Louis in November, 1919. Upon arriving in Kansas City where a change of trains was necessary, Mr. Cohn placed the three women in charge of two red caps while he went to make arrangements for the St. Louis train. When he returned to the depot he met the red cap, Mrs. Cohn and the young Indian woman, following a little in the rear. Upon reaching the train for St. Louis he learned that Dat-So-La-Lee was not with them. He immediately became alarmed and went in search of the great weaver. She was found after a short hunt in charge of a policeman. She explained that since he had deserted them, meaning during the period he had turned them over to the red cap, she was going home, "Me go home", she said.

Dat-So-La-Lee true to Indian custom, turned to the solution used by thousands of Indians. At the first slight, rebuff, or discouragement, they immediately rush back to their native environment and friends which offers peace and protection. She had turned her face westward and on her small moccasined feet, in spite of her three hundred ten pounds, and her ninety years, had started the long Indian trail of fifteen hundred miles over plains and mountains to Carson City.

However, she was kept happy for thirty days at St. Louis where her work created much interest and where she revelled in much publicity.



WORD STUDY

1. reconstruct	6. inference
2. archeology	7. sought
3. excavation	8. automatic
4. culture	9. dire
5. pattern	10. necessity

1. prompted	6. satisfied
2. decision	7. reveal
3. unity	8. basic
4. ceremonials	9. leisure
5. fulfilled	10. sloth

1. amiss	6. arbiter
2. dialects	7. vital
3. traits	8. conform
4. minimal	9. comply
5. sporadic	10. ridicule